

## Looking Good

***For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*** (Romans 14:17 NLT)

God creates us in His image and God is good. However, we also have the potential for the opposite because we the power to choose either to do good or evil. Some of us, for a period of time, chose to act in ways we knew were wrong. At those times we weren't too concerned about right and wrong or making much effort to look good.. At other times, however, we made efforts to clean up, change our life for the better, and behave. However, no matter how hard we may have tried to do the right thing, at some point in life, most of us have done something, again, that went against our code of ethics.

The truth is that, try as we might, we cannot keep all the rules all of the time. We may be able to fool some of the people around us some of the time, but sooner or later, if we are honest human beings, we have to admit the truth to ourselves. We are not automatically good. Worse, we are incapable of it. The Bible makes it very plain: ***“No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”*** (Romans 3:10-12 NLT)

As a five year old we're considered good if we share our toys, mind our parents, don't pinch, don't whine, and use tissues. For adults, goodness is more elusive. We do some things that seem good but there are often other motives hidden below the surface. We give a gift to someone in hopes of getting a favor in return. We sell something quickly as a “real bargain” because we know it is pretty much ready to break down. We try to help someone out but have to tell a lie to do it. We look and act politely and friendly to someone's face but then, behind their back, we gossip about them or complain. Our behaviour is often tainted. Our motives are often mixed.

Jesus had strong words for people who gathered around him who were trying to look good but really were something else under their skin: ***For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity.*** (Matthew 23:27 NLT) Think of meat that is slimy, rotting and full of worms. That's how Jesus was describing people who were trying to look good without really asking God to change them on the inside.

God, who knows our hearts, invites us to do good things for the right reason: ***Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*** (Matthew 5:16 NLT) We are taught to have pure motives and compassionate hearts and to live our actions out of that motivation alone. ***And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good***

***works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching.*** (Titus 2:7 NLT)

Another part of the sickness of our culture is our need to be good, or to seem innocent where we should be admitting guilt. Many people hold the belief that as long as no one catches us, we really haven't done anything bad. As long as we can find some problem in our background to excuse our pain, we're not responsible for our lives of addiction and irresponsibility. As long as some lawyer can find a reasonable judge or a technicality that can get us off, we don't have to worry about the cheating, stealing and assaulting that we've committed. If we deny we do bad things, we suffer on the inside even if our reputation seems to hold together for a while on the outside. God clearly tells us that one of the great gifts of true goodness is the cleansing we feel after we've admitted our faults and our sins. ***If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*** (1 John 1:8-10 NLT)

Keeping the rules and checking the “balance sheet” is another favorite method of tricking ourselves into thinking we are good people. We follow the rules but push and shove anyone who gets in our way while we do it. We use all the times we've done the right thing to excuse ourselves from taking responsibility for the rules we break. We do good things for others and tell ourselves we are “pretty good people” even though we know we have bad attitudes and hidden resentments. The Bible makes a clear distinction between doing good things in an attempt to look good and practicing goodness as a character quality. ***Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*** (Romans 12:9 NLT)

In spite of the challenges and mixtures, as followers of Jesus in lives of recovery we are taught to choose goodness. We're also told that one sign that God lives in us is “goodness.” God has created us for good work, flowing from a good heart. The challenging question for us is: Are we just “looking good” or are we really good? ***O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*** (Micah 6:8 NLT)

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What's an easy trap for me to fall into when I look good on the outside but have something else going on inside?
2. In what areas am I growing so that what goes on inside me, matches the good I do on the outside?
3. How do we make the move from simply looking good to being good?